



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 3 April 2001

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—IND) (4.44 p.m.): I rise today to speak in this Address in Reply debate to the Governor's speech and pledge my loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen. I gives me great pleasure to stand here as part of this 50th Parliament. I do not believe that many current members who were members of the 49th Parliament believed that they would see me here today.

Mr Speaker, as you are aware, I no longer stand here as the member for Barambah, and there is a lot of sadness for me in saying that. I came into parliament as the third member for Barambah following in the immediate footsteps of the previous National Party member. Although I can never hope to fill them, I am proud also to follow in the footsteps of the Premier's oft-stated hero, the first member for Barambah, the legendary Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen. I believe Sir Joh would perhaps look at the make-up of this 50th Parliament with a wry grin. An Independent sits in his seat, a Labor leader sits in his chair, and the once beloved National Party continues in opposition in decreased numbers and alienated from its coalition partner.

As members may recall, the word Barambah means place where the wind blows. With the redistribution, that wind has blown me to my new place, Nanango. Nanango means waterhole. When white settlers moved to the area, there was an Aboriginal tribe nearby. Nanango was the name of the head man of that tribe. Legend has it that the settlers made Nanango a king and had his name engraved on a copper plate, which he wore around his neck on a piece of greenhide. Over time, the copper plate was lost but was finally discovered in the possession of one of the original settler families, who agreed to sell it to the Nanango council for \$2,000. It now rests proudly in the local council chambers.

I take this opportunity to say goodbye to all the constituents of the northern half of the now non-existent electorate of Barambah. I thank them most sincerely for the hesitant friendship which we nurtured and which, over the past two and a half years, has now become a wonderful friendship based on trust, reliability and availability. My special thanks go to Cherbourg elder Mr Joe Button, for whom I have the greatest respect.

I am gratified to know that my efforts to be a true representative for the constituents of the Barambah electorate were noticed and that I have now been given the chance to represent the people of the new Nanango electorate. I pledge to the people of the Nanango electorate that I will represent them with freedom from outside control and freedom from any personal objectives, and I will serve them as I may to the best of my ability.

In the recent election, voters separated rhetoric from reality. It is through the courage of the constituents of the Nanango electorate, who believed that there is a future in allowing Independents and alternative parties to represent their hopes, fears and expectations, that I am here. I thank them all for their support and, with God's help, I pray I will not let them down. I believe that it is only a matter of years before we will witness the return to the situation that existed during the days of our earliest parliament when the majority of members seated in this House were Independents.

Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election to the Speaker's position, but believe the Premier, Mr Beattie, missed a golden opportunity to show that this government, with its overwhelming majority—with 66 members—could be magnanimous. The Speaker of parliament holds a position that requires the greatest integrity, impartiality and fairness to all members of the House. Mr Speaker, you were again nominated for the position of Speaker and your nomination was opposed by the

conservative nomination of the Independent member for Gladstone, Liz Cunningham. Previous years have seen Liz Cunningham hold the balance of power which, although it placed her under enormous pressure from both sides of politics, found her weighing up legislation carefully and voting according to those qualities that I have mentioned. The member for Gladstone, as an Independent, would give the impartiality that is required of a Speaker. In electing Mrs Cunningham as Speaker, Mr Beattie would not have jeopardised in any way his ability to govern; he would have enhanced it. That was a golden opportunity to put the integrity of this 50th Parliament of Queensland beyond question.

During the past three years, it was often stated to me that there was very little difference between the major parties on the big issues and that it was difficult to tell them apart. I do not believe that Labor won this election but that the policies of the Howard government, including deregulation, GST, fuel prices and the BAS, delivered the election to Labor on a silver platter. The greatest ally that the Premier had was John Howard's arrogance. The Premier is now aware that the voters know the value of their vote and it would be wise to ensure that, at the next election, it is this government that feels the constituency's boot. I congratulate the Premier, Mr Beattie, on winning his second term as Premier. I welcome my fellow Independent members, especially Mr Ray Hopper, the new Independent member for Darling Downs. I also welcome all other new members and trust that they become true representatives of their electorates and put principals before personalities and people before politics.

I would like to introduce the Nanango electorate to this parliament. The townships of this electorate include Kingaroy at the northernmost end, which is an expanding area with wine and olive industries. Kumbia is the gateway to the beautiful Bunya Mountains. Crawford is nestled five minutes from Kingaroy. The little town of Harlin is the western gateway to the Brisbane Valley. Kilcoy is one of the most beautiful towns in the electorate and contains what is now my only meatworks. Nanango is the home of the Tarong Power Station and the namesake of the electorate. Yarraman is nestled snugly in the ranges. Blackbutt is the gateway to the South Burnett. Benarkin is a must for any tourist who travels our way. Maidenwell is as beautiful as it sounds. Jimna, potentially the next Bunya Mountains, is the most glorious of areas.

Coominya has been dissected by the boundary changes. There is Crossdale and Linville, which is renowned for many things including a wonderful pub. Kooralgin is a new area to me. Moore is renowned for its crab sandwiches. Mount Kilcoy, Tingoora, Villeneuve, Yabba, Yednia, Somers Dam—members will hear lots more about those places in the future. Esk has many needs. Toogoolawah's special education unit needs a lot of attention from the minister, and I ask that that matter be looked into. There is Mount Mee and Woodford, which has very wide streets and badly needs a crossing for residents. The electorate also takes in the areas of Brooklands, Bryden, Caboonbah, Cooloobunia, Delaney's Creek, Dundas, Glenfern, Goodger, Hazeldene, Inverlaw, Moomba, Mount Stanley and Pine Hill. Yes, it is big, but not as big as some. It also has a big heart. I almost envy the tiny electorate of the member for Aspley, but I would not trade a single inch of the Nanango electorate.

The people of the Nanango electorate are ordinary, honest, hardworking people. I feel their joys, I share their pains and I feel their frustrations. My presence in this House is as a result of the continuation of their frustrations. The people of Nanango are aware that I am not a polished politician. Perhaps that is another reason I am here. They do not expect miracles this time, nor did they last time. Being fair people, they expect me to do no more than I have pledged to do. I continue to work as their messenger. The message they send to this House is, 'We, the people, have had enough of party politics.' The Premier continually states that this is a government for all Queenslanders. Community cabinet meetings are greeted well, but there must be more than just show; there must be a substance and the words spoken must carry through to action.

The 49th Parliament saw a concentration of effort by the Labor government to address the needs of the coastal fringes of this wonderful state. I ask the Premier that, in his pursuit of his jobs, jobs, jobs target, he turns to the west and watches the sun set. Every day when he sees its beauty, he should remember that that sun sets on shires, towns and people who are asking for more than scattered crumbs from the government table. Today I invite the Premier to again come to our area and hold a community cabinet meeting, listen to the needs of the people with ears that hear and observe their needs with eyes that see.

Both now and in the future, on behalf of my electorate, I will petition this government to stop its blind adherence to national competition policy, economic rationalism and deregulation. I petition the government not to show disinterest about their effects on small business and rural industries, and the devastation that the implementation of such policies has on families. Those policies have a domino effect and it is not only industry that suffers but also the local businesses and towns.

I petition this government to stop the haemorrhage of Queensland's sovereignty, which has repeatedly been slashed by our continued adherence to federal policies. In the recent state election, I believe that the people sent a clear message to the federal government: 'Stay out of Queensland.' The people sent another message to all politicians: 'Listen to us, or risk being voted out yourselves.' In my

electorate now, I very rarely hear the words, 'Why vote? One vote doesn't make a difference.' I rarely hear those words because people now know the value of their vote. They have the right and the might, and every election will offer them the opportunity to exercise that right.

I ask that the government address the need to establish industries to offset high unemployment, deregulation and the growing need for value-adding industries such as a multipurpose cannery, an olive press and other facilities that are now necessary because of the expansion of new rural industries in our region. I ask that requests for land to allow for the construction of such facilities be looked on favourably, whether they be in the north of the electorate or in the lush valleys of the south-east.

I ask that the government address the issue of roads where they are a state responsibility and assist in pursuing those which are a federal responsibility. There is an urgent need for the road up the Blackbutt Range to be widened to allow for an overtaking lane. Because of the continuing breaking up of the surface as a result of the increased number of transports using the road, it has become broken, potholed and dangerous. The price of resurfacing and/or widening such a road should not be somebody's life. There needs to be a major addressing of the passenger transport system to overcome the lack of facilities in the Esk, Toogoolawah, Woodford and Kilcoy townships—such facilities taken for granted by larger towns and cities.

The private hospital of St Aubyns continues with the threat of closure hanging over it. A meeting proposed for tonight may very well see that threat become a reality. I continually hear the Health Minister say how great the health services are, but the waiting lists to see specialists, doctors and dentists continue to grow and will be even greater if St Aubyns is closed.

Since entering Parliament in 1998, I have listened to the minister continue to put up arguments as to why retractable syringes cannot be bought into the system to address the problem of drug addiction. In this society we reward all that is morally weak, make legal all that is immoral and pull down all the boundaries that guide society. We place blame on everyone but the perpetrator. We make excuses for wrongdoing and we slap wrists. We look at the crime, the addictions, the high youth suicide rates and we say, 'What's going on? Why is this happening?' Our children scoff our courts. They know their rights, and their age protects them. In our communities, young people know that their best protection is to be part of a minority race gang because, as I was told recently, they do not get into so much trouble. Parents who are less inclined to obey the law send their children out to steal because they, too, know that the child will not be subjected to harsh laws. As one mother stated only last week, 'It's a joke.'

Recently we witnessed the inevitable outcome of the divisive policies that both state and federal governments have adopted. It was reported that native title holders in the Torres Straits Islands committed armed robbery against legally licensed fishermen and it has been stated that they believed that they had the right to do so. The courts reinforced the belief that they have the right to do so without retribution by letting them virtually walk away. I may one day believe that I have the right to break the law, but I will bet my last dollar that I will face the full force of the law. Do not underestimate the resentment that has been building up outside these walls, because governments like this create a double standard in the mistaken belief that they are helping minority groups. Governments create the atmosphere of discontent that incites civil or racial discontent by fostering divisive policies, and I see this discontent more and more every day. It is often called racism by the media and those who prefer not to see the reality, but they are very, very wrong.

I have no greater claim on this world than anyone else, nor has anyone else a greater claim than I. In the previous parliament I learnt a lot from many individuals. The elders of Cherbourg want the same things for their children as I do. The Filipino communities want the same things as well. Those who have come from Germany, Russia, Indonesia and Holland all want the same things.

Recently I had a conversation with a resident of my electorate who had recently arrived and who originally came from Malaysia. She stated that she came to Australia because it offered the best chance for her children. In her words, 'I thought all Australians were equal. That isn't true.' Many diverse cultures make up our egalitarian electorate, and I wish to bring their concerns to the attention of this parliament. What I say may not be what this parliament wants to hear, but it is what is being felt throughout the electorate.

I cannot convey the extent of my thanks to all who assisted me over the past three years, who have stayed firm supporters and friends and who assisted me through the recent election. Val, my electorate secretary, has worked extremely long hours and is often the one who cops it from abusive constituents, but she is also the one who receives the thanks when we sort out constituents' concerns. She is my right arm and I thank her very much. To Debbie, whose organisational skills kept me on the move and who assisted me in covering the entire electorate, I say thankyou. To Peter and his family and to Martin who put in so much time and effort, I say thankyou.

It is impossible to name everyone who assists during an election, but to all who did, such as those who helped on the booths—and they all know who they are—I say, 'Thankyou. The kettle is still boiling, whenever you need a cuppa.' From the bottom of my heart, I thank Col and Nerida, who long ago moved out of the electorate to live hundreds of miles away and who came back purely to drive me around to the many meetings that I attended during the election. As an Independent I have received the support of very loyal party supporters and members of all parties. Without them my task would have been daunting, but they believe in our communities and the need to work as a team in the communities' best interests.

To my husband, Tony, goes my greatest thanks. It is his intimate knowledge and adept handling of a can opener, combined with his passionate love of baked beans, that has ensured the future viability of the navy bean industry.

The people of Nanango did not elect me to denigrate, humiliate, scorn or condemn fellow members of this House. They did not elect me to dismiss out of hand the ideas of others simply because they belong to a different party. They elected me to work for the betterment of themselves and Queensland. When all is said and done, perhaps there is too much said and not enough done for the people we are here to represent. I have heard many good words spoken in this place and many lost amongst the waffle. My words, once again, are for those with the will to listen, the ears to hear, and the desire and commitment to answer the call of the people to work for all Queenslanders—not to say what they think is right and not to say it because someone else might think it right, but to say it because it is right.

I rose today to claim this seat of Nanango. Nanango is an Aboriginal word for waterhole. Although the name may have changed, the valleys, the rivers and the ranges which the name brings to mind are still my idea of heaven.
